'I astonished industry friends by speaking to them in fluent Kannada!'

Not many of those who have listened to and enjoyed Kannada film songs sung by playback singer Priyadarshini know that she learned the language just two years ago. Here she shares her musical journey with **Radhika Vitla**.

RADHIKA VITLA

Her sweet voice, with its involved, emotional feel have captured the hearts of music lovers in the state. But the fact is that popular playback singer Priyadarshini learnt Kannada - or mastered it, perhaps - just a little over two years ago when she first entered the film industry.

A Tamilian who was brought up in Singapore, it took Priyadarshini three months to learn Kannada and get it right, and her impeccable diction today can give any native speaker a complex. And she hasn't stopped at mastery of speech either; she reads Kannada newspapers to learn about happenings in the industry, and even writes some of her songs in the language!

Now one of the established playback singers in Sandalowood, Priyadarshini has also sung for more than 50 movies including those in Tamil and Telugu. Movies she has sung for include *Ramya Rakshita*, *Ajju*, *Yakka*, *Hettare Hennanne Herabeku*, Julie, *Bidda*, *News*, *Nannedeya Hadu*, *Seena*, *Cheluvina Chittara*, *Rockey*, *Nirudyogi* and *Nagashakti*. She has worked with renowned music directors like Hamsalekha, Mano Murthy, Bharadwaj, Gurukiran, Rajesh Ramnath, K Kalyan, Venkat, SA Rajkumar, MN Krupakar, CR Bobby, Narayan etc, and is proud of her achievements in such a short time.

An only child, she credits her parents - Ram, director of India operations at Spanish firm Tecnicas Reunidas, and Sumathi, a homemaker - who she says have always been pillars of strength for her.

Excerpts from the interview:

Tell us about how you first got attracted by music…

I was born in Chennai but when I was just three years old, we shifted to Qatar, Doha. A few years later we shifted to Singapore, where I started my studies. As a child, I was very fond of music and this made my parents enroll me in Classical vocal classes. I started singing when I was 4-5 years old and participated in many competitions held by TV channels, radio stations and schools in Singapore and Chennai. I learned Carnatic music from Mrs. Bhagya Murthy and ghazals from Pandit Charan in Singapore. After returning to India, I am still continuing my Carnatic training with Guru Prof Nagamani Srinath in Bengaluru, Smt Mangalam Shankar and Smt Latha Ramchand in Chennai. I'm also learning Hindustani music from Guru Abhishek.

Being settled in Singapore, what motivated you to enter the film industry here? Was it a dream or something unexpected?

It was really unexpected. When I was in 12th standard in Singapore, a Tamil Radio channel called Oli-96.8FM had organised a music competition in which I won the first prize. The station had arranged for the winners to meet film and music personalities from the Tamil industry. So, I came to Chennai and was introduced to Padmashri Kamal Hasan, music maestro Ilayaraja, music director Deva, singer Nithyashri Mahadevan and many others. They appreciated my talent, and it made me think about a career in playback singing. I returned to Singapore and joined Nanyang Technological University for a degree in Electrical and Electronics Engineering. Around that time, I happened to meet music director Bharadwaj who liked my voice. Later, I got an offer from Bharadwaj Sir to sing a duet with Hariharan for a Tamil film called *Kadal.Com*. I was thrilled and landed in Chennai for the recording. After the movie came out, I got a call from music director Rajesh Ramnath to sing in a Kannada film called *Ajju*. Then offers started pouring in from Kannada and Tamil. Even though it was challenging to cope with balance my academic work in Singapore and a music career in India, I managed to complete BE. I then decided to shift to India, and my father too took a transfer to Bengaluru for my sake and we ended up settling here.

Did you ever listen to Kannada songs before entering the film industry here?

Yes, as a child I used to listen to lots of Kannada film songs which we had in our collection. I like Dr Rajkumar's songs very much, especially *Huttidare Kannada Nadalli Huttabeku*. Dr Vishnuvardhan's *Sevanthiye Sevanthiye* is another favourite.

How much time did it take you absorb the language?

When I was selected to sing a song for *Ajju*, I had a tough time. I had to write the Kannada song in English and learn the pronunciation from music directors and practice it. Later, when I shifted permanently to Bengaluru, language became an even bigger concern. My Dad was very interested in learning Kannada and he joined the Kannada classes of Kannada Prasara Parishat here. He suggested that I and Mom too join the course. So I took a three- month Kannada learning course that covered reading, writing and speaking, and soon picked up the language and even started reading Kannada newspapers. I astonished my friends in the industry by speaking to them in fluent Kannada!

In your view, are there any advantages in being a Kannada film singer when compared to other film industries?

Kannada playback field is very very supportive and have helped me a lot. As for the songs themselves, in Kannada there is lot of importance to melodious songs and these days especially there are many good melodious songs coming out of the Kannada industry when compared to others. It is the main plus point I think.

What are your most cherished memories as a playback singer…

One was when my two devotional albums were released by Parvathamma Rajkumar and Raghavendra Rajkumar, family members of Dr Rajkumar who I loved so much throughout my childhood. It was really overwhelming and memorable to me. Another was when I sang for two hours in front of Dr Vishnuvardhan, who is also a favourite from my childhood days, at his house for Krishna Janmashtami celebrations in August 2009, just a few months before his death. He appreciated me a lot and it is one incident I will never forget.